



The Germans about Poland and the Poles 2000 – 2006

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The image that the German public have of Poland and the Polish people is much less crystallized than the image of Germany in Poland. When the Germans are asked questions about Poland they respond ambivalently or do not have an opinion at all, much more often so, than when Poles talk about Germany. Almost 20% of Germans do not have any associations with our country. And when some associations are listed, the negative ones clearly prevail.

However, some positive changes can be noted. An ISP survey carried out six years ago in 2000, indicated that Poland was perceived as a remote and backward country. That aspect of the image, even though still significant, is now becoming less important. We are now, to a lesser extent, looked at from the point of view of our backwardness. The percentage of respondents describing Poles as backward has fallen from 44 to 32%. Similarly, the Germans more often point out that Poles are hardworking or highlight the economic development in Poland. The awareness of the changes that have been taking place in Poland since 1989 has been slowly growing among the German people. So far the German public pointed rather to the distance in the level of civilisation rather than to the dynamics of change in Poland. Now we can venture to say that the changes have been slowly becoming a part of the image of Poland. Such a belated positive reaction to the economic and political transformation of the 1990s may have been triggered, among other factors, by the Polish accession to the EU in May 2004. Poles have not only started to participate in EU policies but they also, symbolically, have crossed the border to the West – they “have joined the club”, which – in spite of all the concerns shared by the Germans and related to issues such as labour market situation – may create favourable conditions for rejecting the stereotype of a “backward outsider”. However, we still have a long way to go before the stereotype is deeply changed and before we successfully overcome the negative images. Maybe that way should lead to increasing the interest of the German public in Poland and, in particular, encouraging them to visit our country. The surveys indicate that the people who have visited Poland after 1989 (30% of the adult Germans) have a more positive perception of Poland and the Poles.

The public opinion survey conducted by the Institute of Public Affairs is a part of the project „The Mutual Perception of Germans and Poles as members of the European Union” with support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation, the Bosch-Foundation, the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation, and under the patronage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The fieldwork was conducted by the TNS-Emnid between 29th April and 7th Mai 2006 with the representative sample n=1009 persons over 14 years old.



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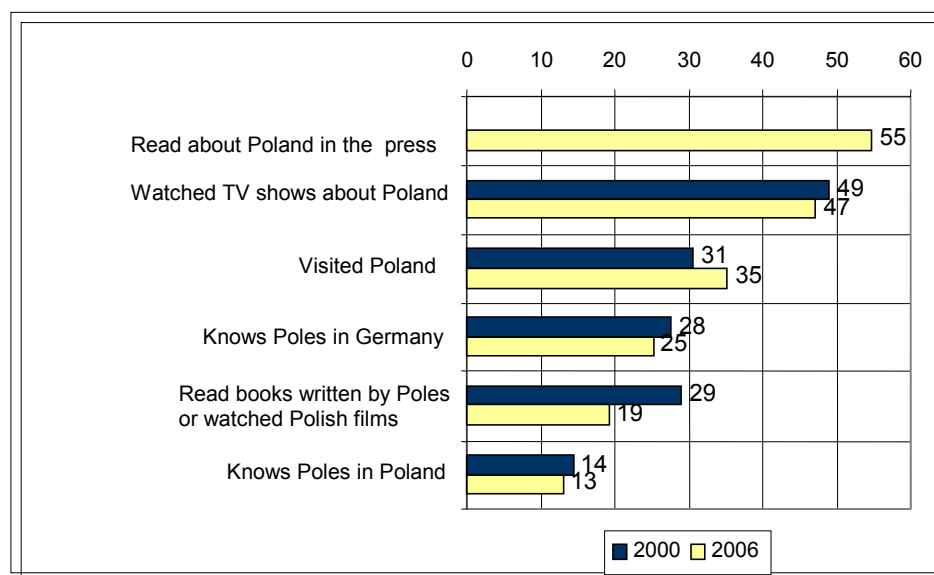


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Germans' contacts with Poland

Almost every fourth German has never had any contact with Poland. 23% of respondents not only have never been in Poland and do not know any Poles, but neither have they had any indirect contact with Poland, for example by reading articles about Poland in the press or watching programs about Poland on television. Compared to the study conducted in 2000, there is a higher percentage of respondents declaring that they have been in Poland at least once in their life (35%). That growth is most visible among residents of the *Länder* bordering on Poland. Germans continue to draw information about Poland primarily from the media – press and television.

Fig. Contacts with Poland, sources of knowledge about Poland (in %).



Source: IPA data

After the fall of communism, nearly 30% of Germans came to Poland at least once. Therefore, there is a certain symmetry in visits to the neighbouring country. Indeed, also 30% of adult Poles declare to have visited Germany after the fall of communism. Those Germans who were in Poland after 1989 make up the respondent group with direct knowledge of present-day Poland. In addition, that group maintains other types of contacts with Poland more frequently. These individuals much more frequently than other respondents sought out information about Poland in the media, read Polish books and watched Polish films.

Visits to Poland depend on the region of residence. **Germans who live near the Polish border¹ declare to have visited Poland much more often. More than 80% have been to Poland at least once.** However, it can be assumed that the purpose of these visits is

¹ Brandenburg, Mecklenburg West-Vorpomerania, Saxony and the City of Berlin. Residents of these *Länder* make up 16% of the sample (N=159).

commercial rather than one focused on establishing contacts with Poles or learning about their country. Indeed, inhabitants of borderline areas do not have Polish acquaintances any more frequently and read about Poland in the press or watch TV programs about it even less than residents of other German regions.

A direct contact promotes (next to education) a more positive perception of Poles, a friendlier attitude toward them and increased acceptance in various walks of everyday life. A better image of Poles and Poland is had by university graduates and those Germans who have visited Poland after the fall of communism. Inhabitants of the *Länder* bordering on Poland are among them. **On the other hand, a poorer image of Poland is had by those to whom the only or primary contact with their neighbours East of the border is provided by the media.**

Negative associations about Poland prevail

A large part of German respondents (18%) has no association with their eastern neighbour at all and that has not changed in the past six years. To compare, practically all Polish respondents had some association with Germans and most often they were even able to provide several examples. Among German respondents, a majority (47%) provided only a single association. What is more, these associations are rather scattered.

Negative associations dominate (41%) over positive ones (30%). The most often evoked association that Germans have with Poland is crime (14%, this has not changed much since 2000), in particular car theft. Subsequent associations are also negative (41% of respondents cited negative issues such as illegal work, taking away jobs from Germans, poverty, backwardness, unemployment, poor economy, unqualified labour force and World War II). They prevail over positive associations such as low prices, shopping, rapid development, economic growth, EU membership, European partner, pretty landscape, holidays, culture, rich history, Polish cuisine, diligence, good workers, friendliness, hospitality. **The strength of negative stereotyping of Poland by Germans is confirmed by their initial spontaneous association that is more often negative than positive.**

Associations with a cheap labour force, which in 2000 were practically absent, are becoming stronger. Their appearance must be linked not only to the actual presence of Poles on the German labour market but also to the debate on the enlargement of the European Union. **Among respondents opposed to the enlargement, associations with the labour market as well as crime appear more often:** crime – 19%, illegal work, taking jobs away - 16%). Associations with the labour market also depend on the education level. They dominate among respondents with elementary and secondary education. However, labour market and labour force issues can be also grounds to either neutral or downright positive associations, as in the case of citing Poles' diligence.

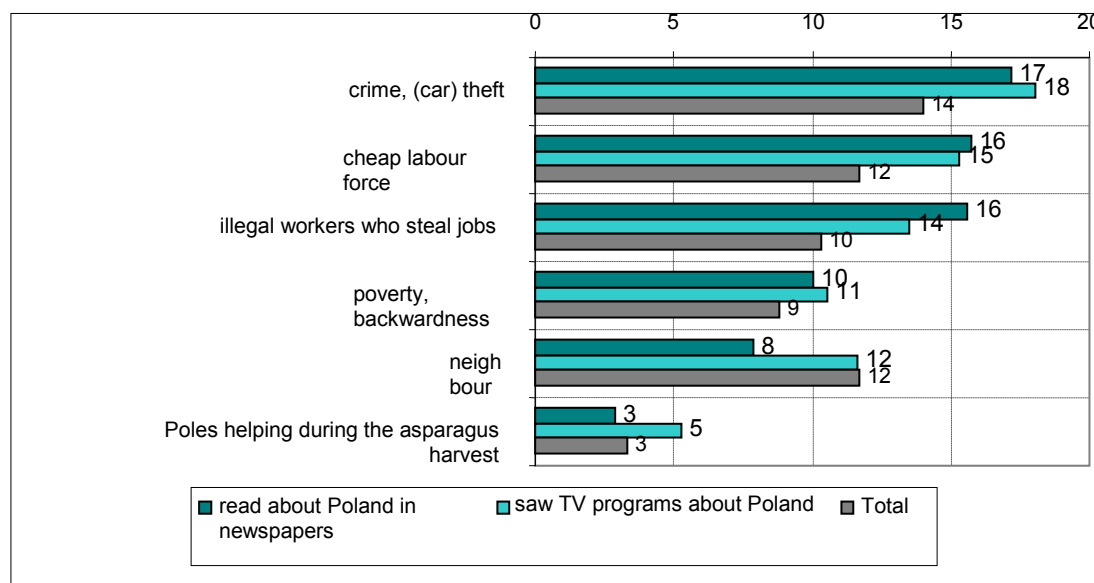
Table 1. Germans' associations with Poland (in %)

Association group	Associations and percentages
Everyday life (including work)	(car) theft, crime (14)
	low prices, shopping, cheap to visit (8)
	cheap labour force (12), Poles helping with asparagus harvest (3)
	illegal workers, taking jobs from Germans (10)
Situation in Poland	poverty, backwardness (9)
	agriculture (2)
	quickly developing country (economic growth), trade contacts (4)
	unemployment (1)
	poor economy, unqualified workers (2)
Mutual relations and politics	neighbour to the east, abroad, large country (12)
	EU member, European partner (4)
History	former German territory (1)
	World War II, former enemy, deportations (5)
	(former) eastern block, Warsaw Pact (2)
	Wałęsa, Solidarity, breakthrough in 1989 (2)
	persecutions of Jews (0.5)
Tourism, culture	pretty landscapes, holidays, Baltic Sea (8)
	cities (Warsaw, Krakow, Gdansk) (2)
	culture, rich history (1)
	Polish cuisine, vodka (2)
Religion	Catholicism (2)
	pope, John Paul II (5)
Personal contacts	family ties, former motherland (5)
	acquaintances, relatives (2)
Human traits	diligence, good workers (3)
	friendliness, hospitality (3)
Other	sport, World Football Championship (adversary in the same group) (1)

Figures in the table refer to the percentage of respondents stating the given association. Respondents could state several associations so, consequently, percentages do not add up to 100%. Source: IPA data.

The media play a role in shaping a negative perception of Poland. People who have contact with Poland primarily through the media (without any other type of contact) more often associate Poland with theft and illegal work. That group has more or less the same percentage of associations about Poland as remaining respondents, but its associations are more often negative. It also puts more stress than other respondents on differences between Poles and Germans. Even though the conviction of the dissimilarity between Poles and German is characteristic to the entire sample, people who have contact with Poland primarily through the media put more accent on it.

Fig. Associations by Germans whose knowledge about Poland comes primarily from the media (in %)



Source: IPA data

University graduates and inhabitants of the *Länder* that border on Poland more often associate Poland with positive traits. Among university graduates, primary associations are: holidays, pretty landscapes, neighbourly country and pleasant people (11%). Negative associations appear in this group much more seldom than among people without secondary education who associate Poland more with cheap labour force and stealing German jobs. In turn, **Germans originating from the *Länder* neighbouring on Poland associate that country primarily with low prices and good shopping (20%),** and then holidays and beautiful landscapes (14%). They less often perceive Poles as criminals (9%) and those who steal German jobs and work illegally (9%). It must be added that associations in other *Länder* of the former German Democratic Republic, those distanced from Poland, are among most negative. Consequently, contacts within the border zone seem to lead to burying old prejudices originating mainly in communist German propaganda.

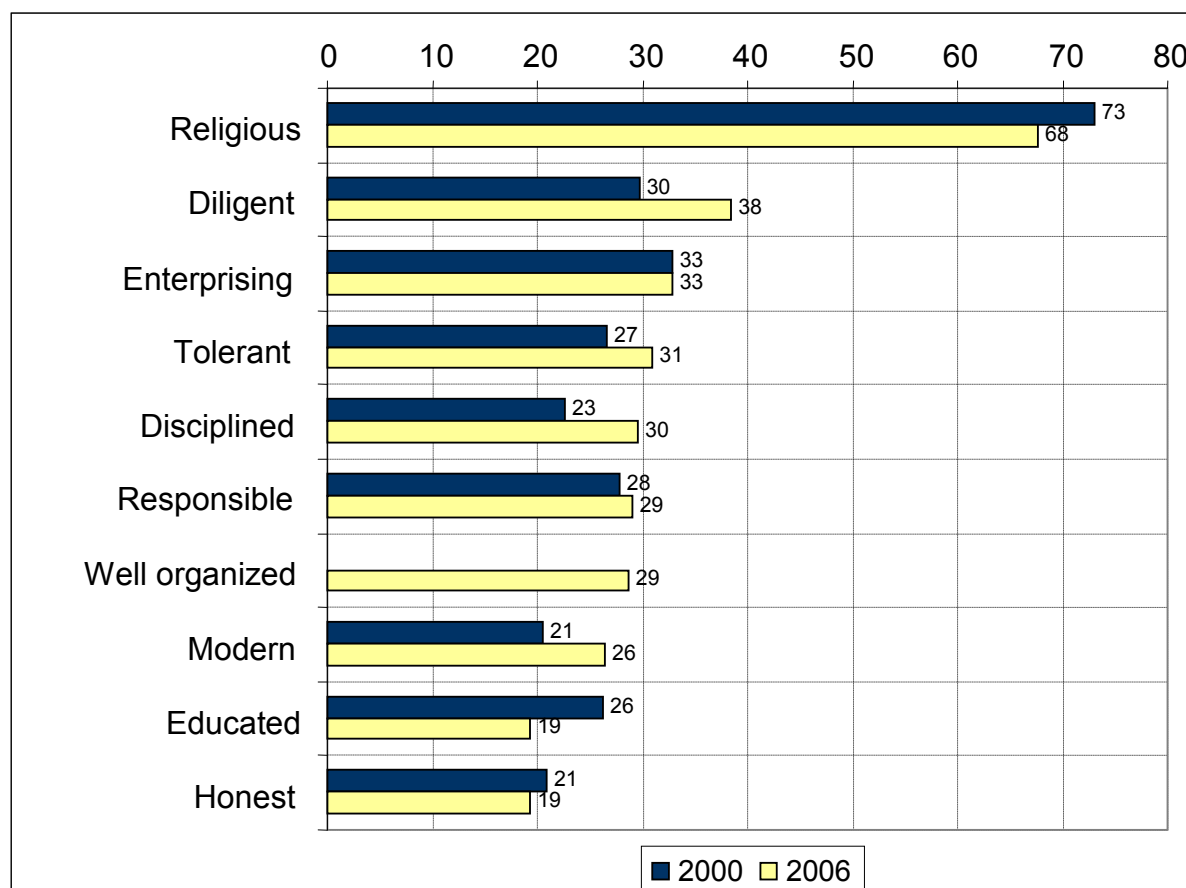
Poles are less backward and more diligent at work

Spontaneous associations about Poland are, therefore, mostly negative, although they contain elements, or signals, of positive changes. Those positive changes are starting to be more visible in responses to closed questions concerning the image of a typical Pole and the image of Poland. German perceive their neighbours across the Oder River somewhat more positively than six years ago. Most progress has taken place in the assessment of those elements of Poland's image that is associated with the economy, economic growth and diligence at work. A drop in the percentage of all negative assessments is also noteworthy.

In a German person's eyes, a typical Pole is first and foremost religious (68%). This trait is indicated most often, although by 5% less often than in 2000. The 5% drop may support the thesis that "Poland's image is being updated" and go hand in hand with the drop in indications about Poles' backwardness. Indeed, for Germans who express their opinions about Poles, religiosity is not completely a neutral trait reduced to a strictly religious dimension. In the

German culture there exists a rather widespread opinion that Catholicism is an obstacle to modernization. Another indicated Polish trait, much less present than religiosity but appreciated to a greater degree than in the preceding study, is work diligence (38%). In 2000, that characteristic was listed only in the fourth place (a clear 8% rise).

Fig. The typical Pole – positive traits (codes 1 and 2 – decisive or qualified agreement with suggested statement (in %).



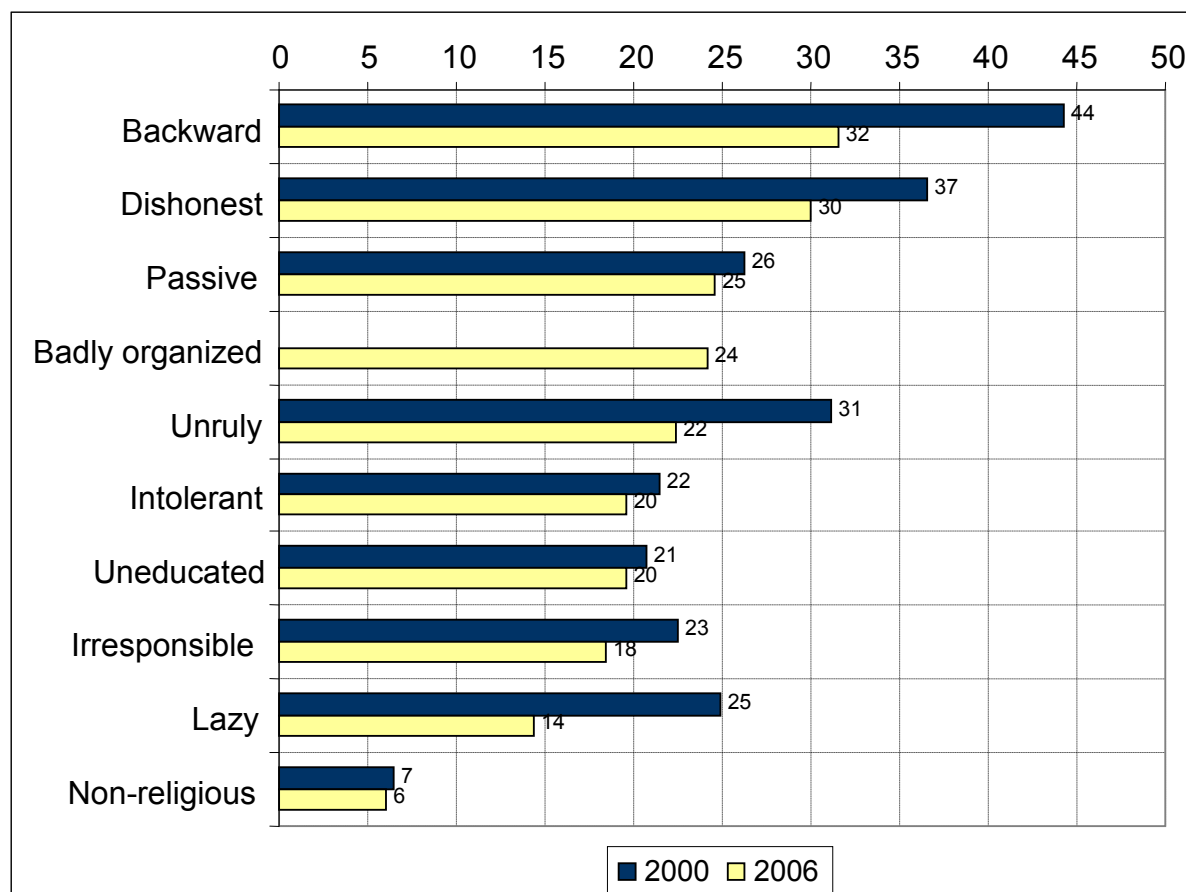
Source: IPA data

The positive trend is also signalled by an analysis of negative characteristics ascribed by Germans to Poles. Poles continue to be perceived as rather backward and dishonest. Currently these characteristics are the only ones for whom the percentage of negative responses exceeds positive (therefore, Germans are more inclined to speak about Poles as dishonest rather than honest), which additionally underlines their negative force. However, positive changes have indeed taken place. Only one third of German respondents points at Poles' dishonesty and backwardness (yes, unfortunately we cannot help but be happy with that one third...). The drop in negative assessments is significant: 13% with respect to backwardness and 7% with respect to dishonesty.

The feature that sticks out as concerns changes in the perception of the stereotypical Pole is the **overall drop in the rate of indications of negative characteristics**. While in the case of positive characteristics discussed above changes happened in different areas, in the case of negative characteristics there is no one particular category that would be indicated more often

than in the previous study. This can be interpreted as a shift toward an “improved” stereotype of the Pole or as a **“moment of hesitation” also exemplified by the growing percentage of ambivalent responses**. Indeed, every second German has no opinion about the typical Pole and the image of Poland, or has purposefully chosen mid-scale responses. Ambivalent responses were given more often than in 2000. At that time, mid-scale responses to questions about Poland and the typical Pole averaged 41-43%, in this study - 47-48%.

Fig. The typical Pole – negative traits (codes 4 and 5 – decisive or qualified agreement with suggested statement (in %)



Source: IPA data

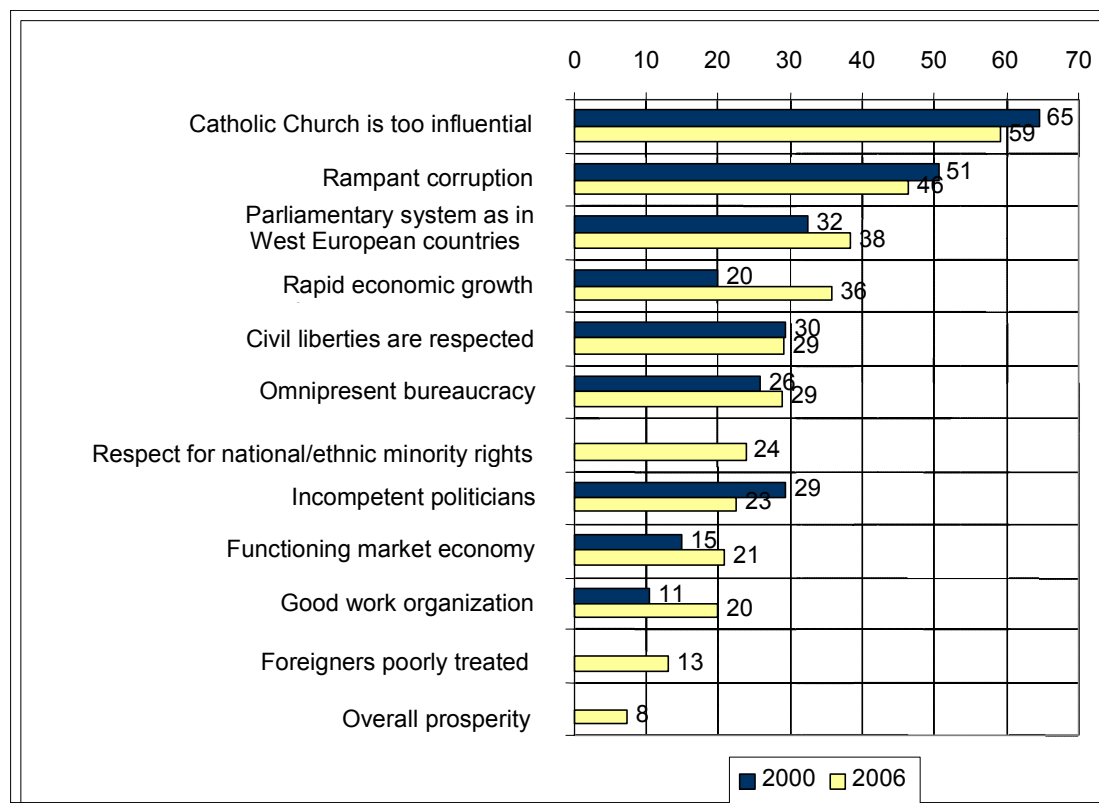
Appreciated Polish economy

Changes in the perception Germans have of the typical Pole are consistent with changes in their perception of Poland. Poland continues to be perceived primarily as a country strongly influenced by the Catholic Church, but by fewer respondents than in 2000 (down from 65% to 59%). The same goes for the perception of the typical Pole’s religiosity.

Positive changes are taking place in the perception of Polish economy. It can be said that after 10 years of rapid economic growth, our western neighbours have finally realized how quick that growth has been. The appreciation of rapid economic growth in Poland was confirmed by

36% of German respondents - 15% more than in 2000. Germans also increasingly often confirm other positive statements about Polish economy (although these agreements are still relatively few): every fifth respondent believes that Poland has a market economy. As in the question about the existence of parliamentary democracy, the perception of Poland continues to be negative but positive changes have taken place since 2000.

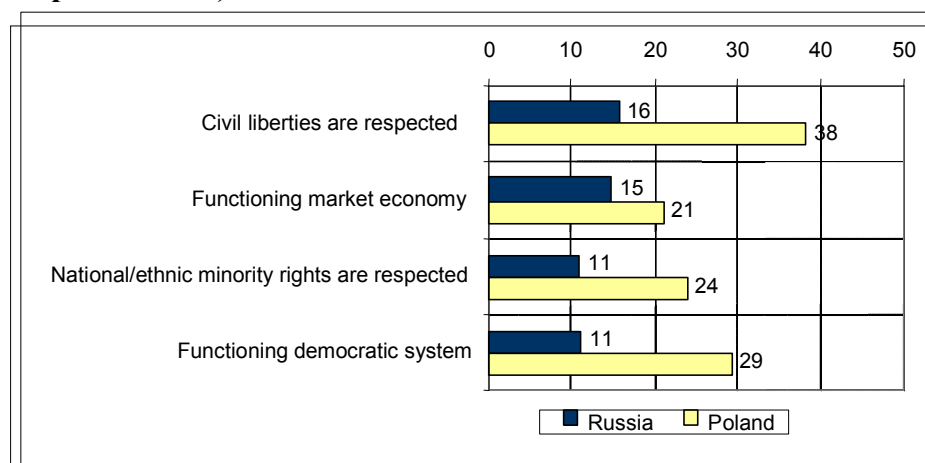
Fig. Perception of Poland (codes 1 and 2 – decisive or qualified agreement with suggested statement (in %).



Source: IPA data

Indeed, in 2000, more than one half of polled Germans leaned toward the opinion that market economy did not operate in Poland! Today this opinion is much less frequent although, sorry to say, it is still present (29%). Next to the persistently strong conviction about the absence of democratic and free-market institutions in Poland, very telling is the conviction of 25% of respondents about the lack of respect for national and ethnic minorities. Nevertheless, respondents in Germany perceive Poland's progress in this area as well, as evidenced, for example, in differences between their assessment of Poland and Russia.

Fig. Assessment of Poland vs. assessment of Russia (“definitely agree” and “agree” responses in %).



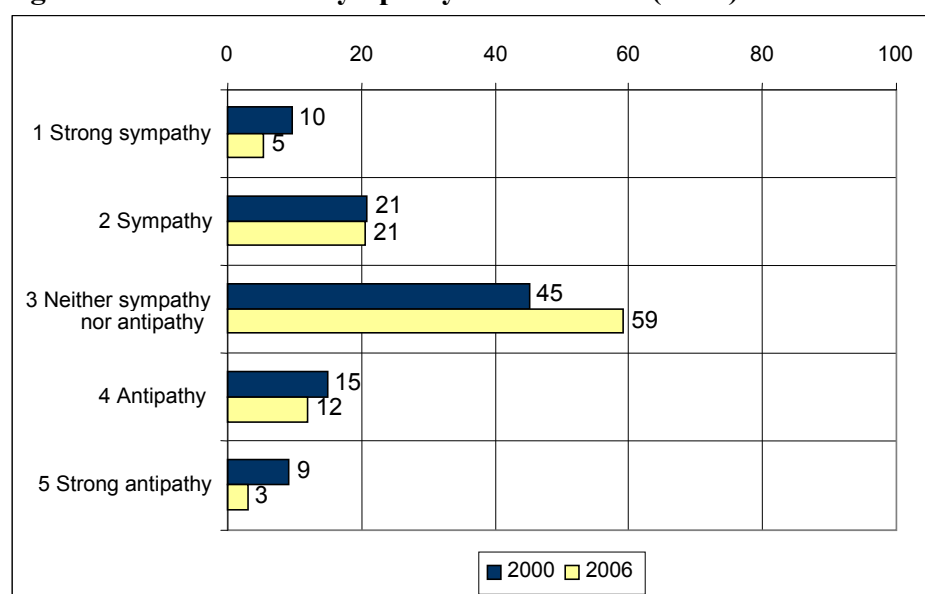
Source: IPA data

Sympathy, sense of kinship, acceptance of Poles

All in all, Germans feel sympathy for Poles, although their majority is not able to specify their feelings. The proportion of respondents sympathetic to Poles is quite significant: antipathy is felt by 15% of German respondents, sympathy – by 26%. However, compared to 2000, the level of sympathy has slightly dropped. The percentage of the undecided is noteworthy – **almost two thirds of Germans were not able to specify why they felt sympathy toward Poles.**

More sympathy toward Poles is felt by residents of the old West German *Länder* (29%) who were in Poland after 1989 (35%), and by better educated respondents. Antipathies subside proportionally to direct contacts with Poland and higher education.

Fig. Level of Germans’ sympathy toward Poles (in %)



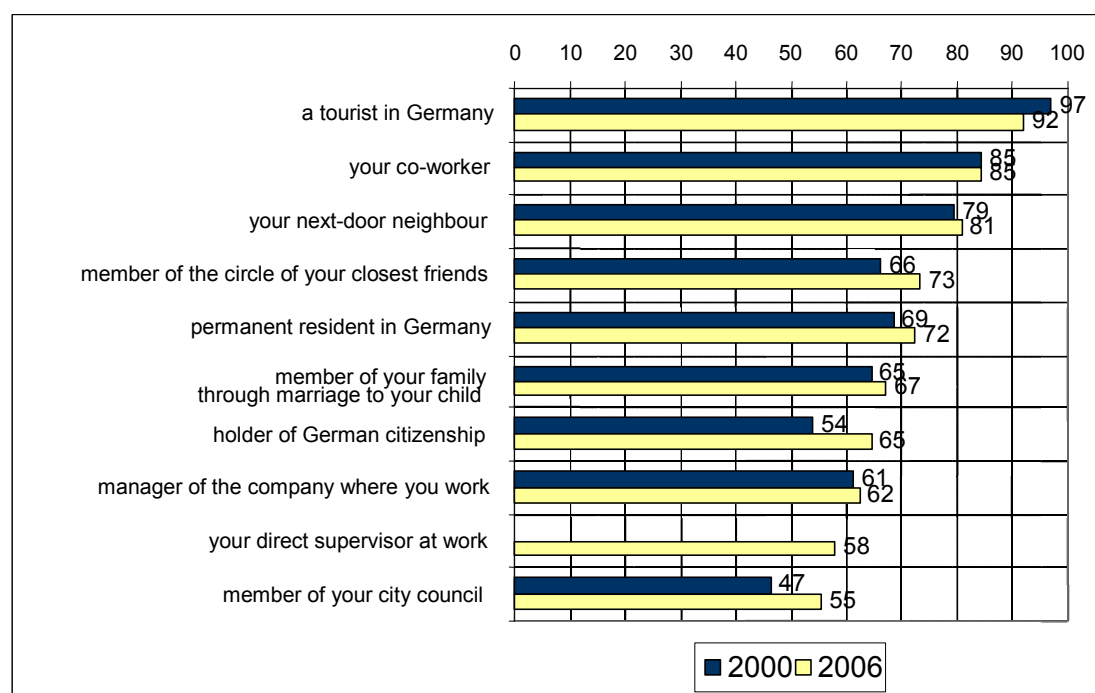
Source: IPA data

Acceptance of Poles in everyday and political life

The acceptance of various roles played by Poles in Germany's everyday, professional and social life has slightly grown in the past few years.² Most noteworthy is the higher acceptance of Poles in the dimension of the political commonwealth. Germans today are more inclined than six years ago to grant a citizenship to a Pole (growth by 10%) and accept his/her presence on the city council (growth by 9%), even though respondents accept this domain of Polish presence in Germany the least. The growth of the sense of acceptance is also confirmed by the fact that no other form of contact has met with more objection than acceptance (as was the case in 2000). As concerns Poles' work in Germany, it is noteworthy that Poles are accepted as co-workers (85% - no change), but less willingly as superiors (approx. 60%). In general terms, relations bearing the features of subordination are much less acceptable.

Fig. Levels of distance felt by Germans toward Poles – the table shows acceptance percentages; negative responses make up the difference to 100%.

Would you accept a Pole as:



Source: IPA data

Most accepting of Poles are residents of the *Länder* bordering on Poland (the acceptance index is even higher here than in the case of the western *Länder*, although the difference is only slight). **Whereas the lowest level of acceptance is found in other eastern *Länder*. We dealt with a very similar situation in the case of the sense of sympathy – *Länder* of the**

² A note concerning methodology: in 2006, the catalogue of possible responses did not include the "no opinion" option. Consequently, to provide for comparability, "no opinion" responses from the 2000 study were treated here as no data. This, however, can have a negative effect on the interpretation of study results since the number of "no opinion" responses was quite high in 2000 – up to 24% in the case of the acceptance of a Pole as the spouse of the respondent's child.

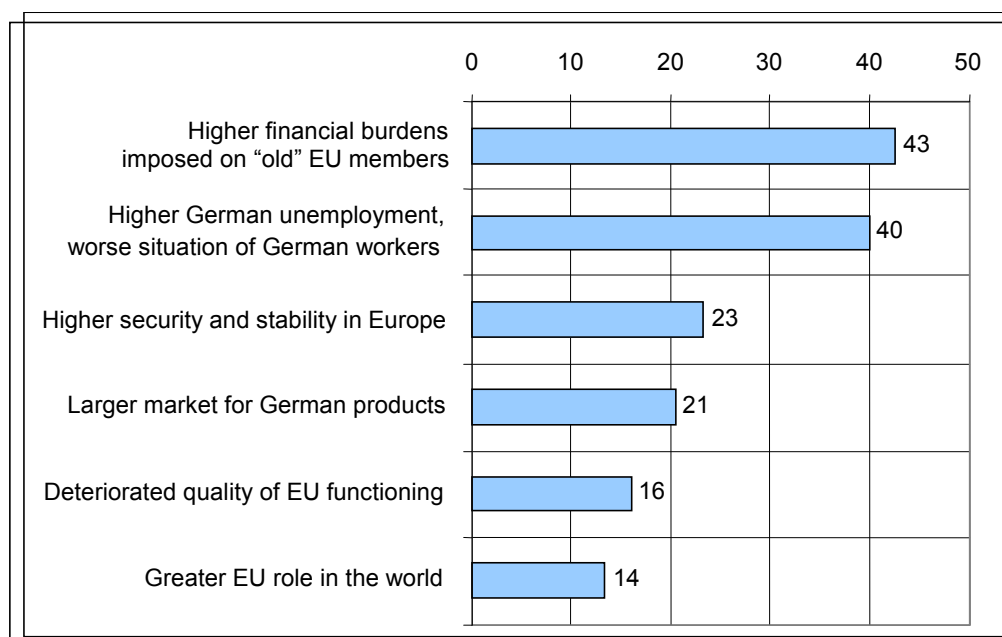
former GDR which border on Poland show a higher level of sympathy than those that do not border on Poland – and in the case of the sense of kinship. This may indicate a turn-about in the historically shaped antipathy for Poles in the eastern *Länder*. Traditionally, Poland met with more antipathy in the *Länder* of the former GDR than in West Germany.

Assessment of the EU enlargement and Poland's role in Europe

The assessment of Poland is associated with the wider assessment of the EU enlargement and its consequences. Many Germans (43%) have a rather critical opinion of the latest enlargement, whereas only a few percent less (40%) are inclined toward its positive assessment. A decisive majority of respondents (64%) considers that the enlargement benefited primarily the new members. **A positive attitude is indicated by respondents who feel more sympathy toward Poland, feel a greater kinship with Poles and are more inclined to accept them in everyday and political life.** Such attitude is promoted by better education. Among respondents who visited Poland after 1989 (49% of positive responses) and those who reside in regions bordering on Poland (40%), positive responses exceed negative. The attitude toward Poland is more positive among CDU supporters (44%) than among those who support SPD (41%), but both are far behind the enthusiasm shown for Poland by respondents who support the Green Party (62%).

The IPA study conducted in 2000 showed that for 60% of Germans the European Union was firstly an economic community and only then a political one. The outcome of the present study also indicates the supremacy of economic arguments in Germans' opinions. Higher expenditures suffered by "old" EU members as a result of the enlargement and its negative effect on the German labour market are mentioned much more often than arguments associated with politics or functioning of the EU.

Fig. Main consequences of the EU enlargement (no more than two selections were allowed).

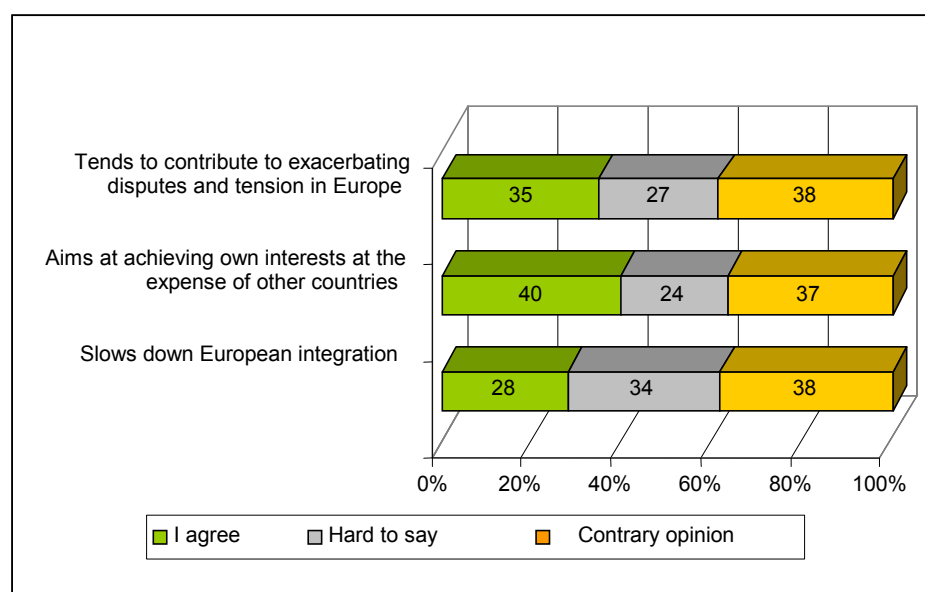


Source: IPA data

Respondents with a positive attitude toward the EU enlargement focus first and foremost on the higher security and stability in Europe (47%), and a larger market for German products (38%). Whereas respondents critical of the enlargement concentrate on its negative consequences: higher unemployment in Germany and worse situation of German workers (66%), higher financial burdens imposed on “old” EU members (60%), deteriorated quality of EU functioning (28%). Similarly, respondents who point at new EU member states as main beneficiaries of the enlargement see mainly its negative effects: a higher cost burden to “old” member states (52%), growth of unemployment in Germany and deteriorated condition of German workers (51%), deteriorated functioning of the European Union (20%). A much more positive outlook at the enlargement is shown by respondents who consider that both “old” and “new” EU member states benefit from it: higher security and stability in Europe (45%), a larger market for German products (41%), a greater role played by the EU in the world (29%).

How is Poland’s European Union policy seen against this background? Germans are quite ambiguous about it. Respondent groups of roughly the same size are inclined to opposite opinions – positive and negative – about Poland’s European policy.

Fig. Assessment of Poland’s EU policy

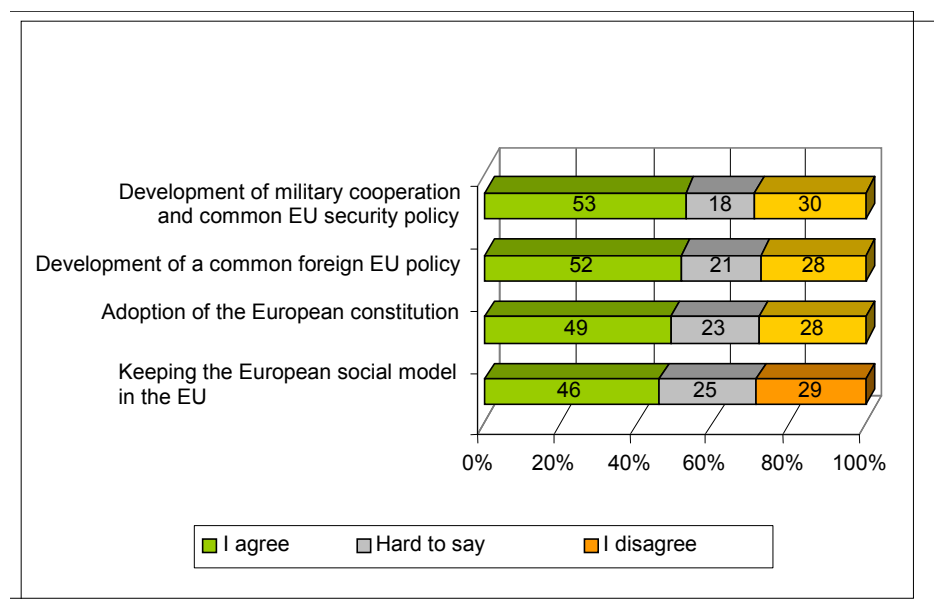


Source: IPA data

However, it must be stressed that these questions are difficult and respondents had a hard time answering them. More than one third of respondents had no opinion about Poland’s attitude toward further European integration. Whereas among those who had an opinion, most tended to consider that Poland acted in favour of a deeper integration (38% against, 28% who had a contrary opinion).

Germans are more inclined to say that in the most important directions of European integration that can count on Poland’s support. That opinion was stated by approximately 50% of respondents.

Fig. Issues concerning EU policies and development in which Germans can count on Poland's support (in %)



Source: IPA data

Poland - its policy toward Russia and trans-Atlantic relations

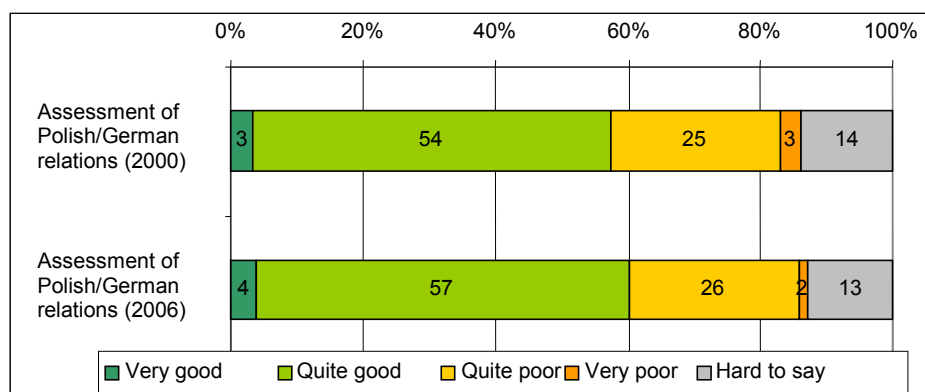
In the eastern policy dimension which is important for Poles, Germans place cooperation with Russia ahead of cooperation with the Poland. **According to the respondents, German interests benefit more from cooperation with Russia (25%) than with Poland (9%).** More than one half of respondents considers that cooperation with both countries is equally important for Germany (53%). The majority opinion is also that, in its cooperation with Russia, Germany ought to take into consideration the interests and opinions of Poland more than it has done thus far (45%, although only 7% responded with “decidedly yes”). A contrary opinion is indicated by 38% of respondents, and 12% is “decidedly” against consulting Poland.

Would it be that one of the reasons for a rather sceptical approach to consulting Poland lies in the German conviction of Poland's overly close alliance with the United States? Probably not. There is no dominant conviction in the German society that relations with the US are more important for Poland than its relations with the EU and its members. 17% of respondents consider that the United States are more important for Poland, 20% that the European Union is more important.

Polish/German relations

Socio-demographic variables in the German society do not affect German opinions about Polish/German relations. Their assessment is not affected by respondents' age or education, residence in the *Länder* bordering on Poland or visit in Poland after 1989. Germans who sympathise with Poland have a more positive opinion of bilateral relations.

Fig. Assessment of Polish/German relations (in %)

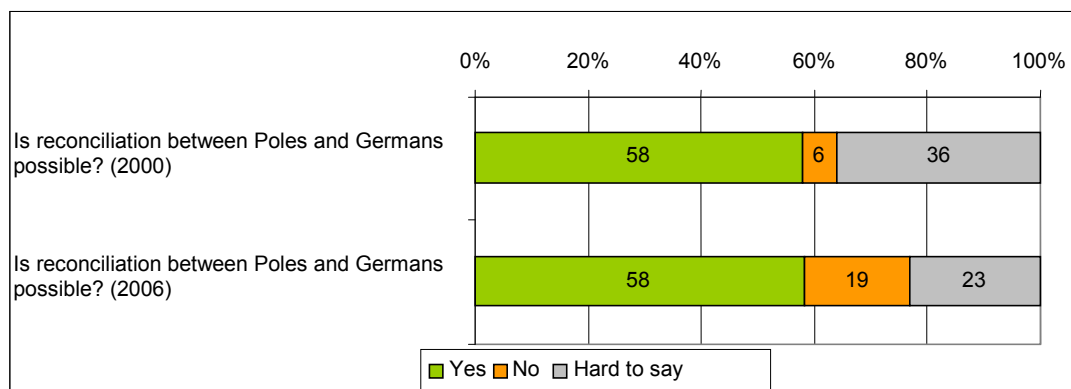


Source: IPA data

Respondents who see Polish/German relations as poor (28%, n=270) believe it to be primarily an effect of conflicting Polish and German interests (34%). This stands in contrast to the opinion expressed by Poles, who believe that they are mainly a result of a difficult common history (43% of responses, other 2 responses - 26-29%). This difference of opinion points to a dissimilar attitude of both nations to the impact of history on mutual relations.

One of the indicators of mutual attitudes of Poles and Germans may lie in the answer to the question about the possibility of reconciliation of the two nations. More than one half of German respondents (58%) believes such reconciliation to be possible – the same percentage as in 2000. What has changed is the percentage of the undecided – it has dropped by more than 10% and seemingly indicates that the group which considers reconciliation impossible³ has grown – that group has increased almost four-fold and currently amounts to nearly 20%.

Fig. Assessment of the possibility of reconciliation between Poles and Germans



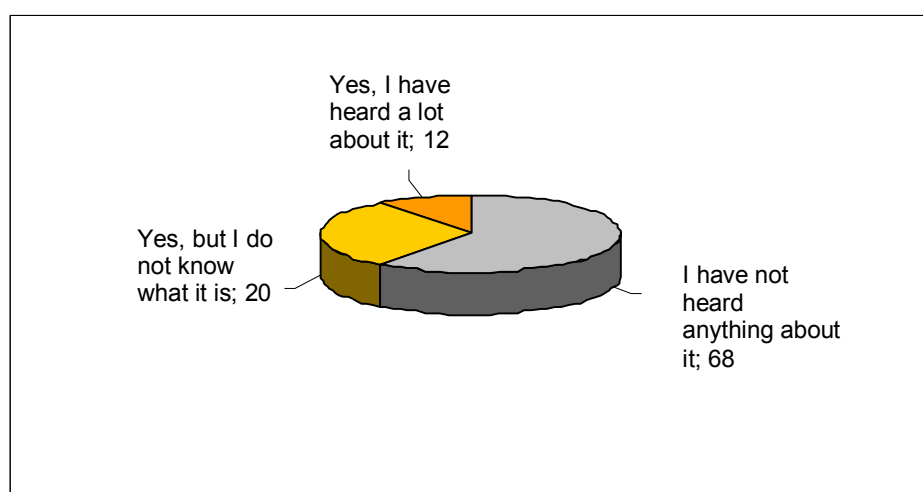
Source: IPA data

³ A note concerning methodology: that difference may be partly a result of the sequence of questions as they appear in the questionnaire. In the latest poll, the question about reconciliation followed the question about negative elements in mutual relations associated with the painful past, whereas in the 2000poll it followed the neutral open question “What do you think divides and connects Poles and Germans?”

Germans on the Centre Against Expulsions

A majority of Germans (68%) has not heard about Erica Steinbach's initiative to commemorate German expellees of the World War II period. 20% of respondents have heard about it but do not know what it is. Only 12% have heard about it and declare that they know a lot about the subject. It may be assumed that some 12% to 15% of Germans have been interested in this issue to some degree and have an opinion about it.

Fig.. Germans' knowledge of the Centre Against Expulsions

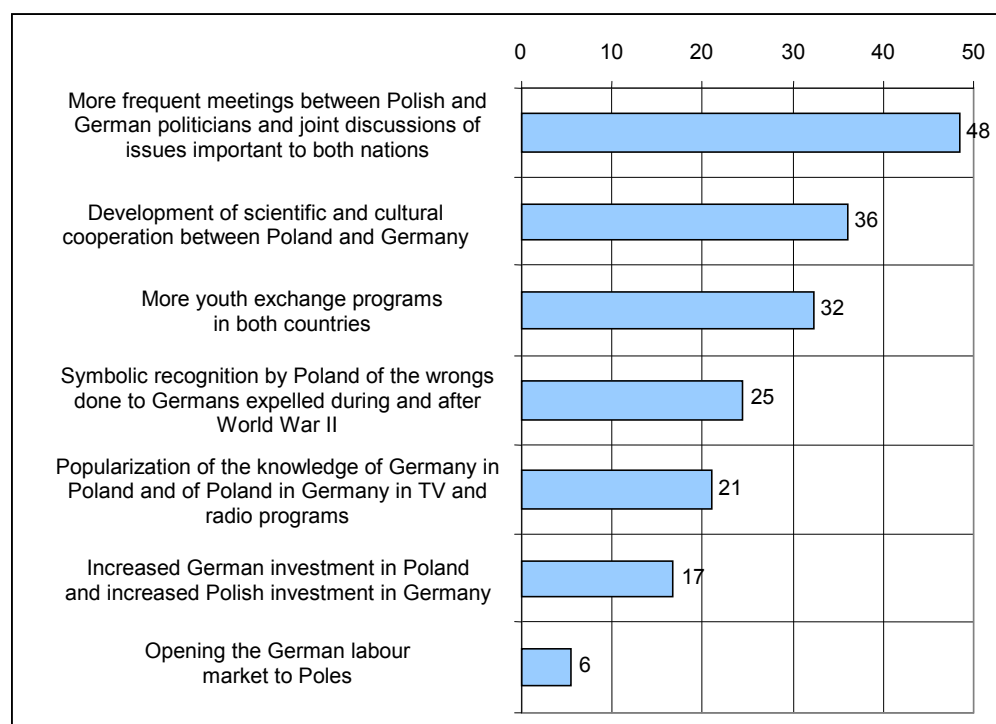


Source: IPA data

The issue is particularly alive among those who believe that World War II continues to affect Polish/German relations. In that group, the percentage of respondents acknowledging familiarity with the Centre amounts to 20%. **The initiative interests primarily respondents who are over 66 years of age (25%).** Young respondents are completely disinterested (in the group younger than 29 years, 80% have heard nothing about the subject; in the age 30-45 group - 74%). **Among those who have heard about the Centre Against Expulsions, most (48%) assess Erika Steinbach's initiative positively.**

It must be noted that a significant group of respondents (25%) believes that relations between Poland and Germany would improve if "Poland symbolically admitted that wrongs have been committed against Germans during and after World War II". This percentage gives a high rank to the issue and may indicate that, irrespective of the familiarity with and support of Erika Steinbach's initiative, Germans are slowly moving toward a stronger sense of having been wronged and having also been victims of World War II. Also in the context of their relations with Poland and Poles.

Fig. Actions that in Germans' opinion would contribute to better Polish/German relations now and in the future (no more than three selections were allowed) (in %).



Source: IPA data

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The public opinion poll that lies at the foundation of this study was conducted within the framework of the project "Poland-Germany; mutual perception on Poles and Germans in the face of their joint presence in the EU" in cooperation with Robert Bosch Foundation, Konrad Adenauer Foundation and Polish/German Cooperation Foundation under the patronage of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs. The poll was conducted in the field by TNS-Emnid company between April 29th and May 5th, 2006, on a representative sample of 1009 persons over the age of 14. The poll on the perception of Poles in Germany conducted in November 2000, the results of which are often cited in this study, had been also conducted by TNS-Emnid on a representative sample of 1000 persons over the age of 14.